

# Clandestine Drug Labs

# Extent of Problem

- \$175 of raw materials
- 1 pound of pure methamphetamine
- \$32,000 street value

# Clandestine Drug Labs

- 85% of activity is in three states:
  - California
  - Oregon
  - Texas

# Clandestine Drug Labs

- Calls to investigate “unusual odors”
  - Dried cat urine
  - Cat litter
  - Rotten garbage

# Clandestine Drug Labs

- Responses to overdoses
- Responses to corrosive exposures or burns that are poorly explained

# Clandestine Drug Labs

- Windows covered with plastic, cardboard, or paint
- “Chemistry lab” glassware

# Clandestine Drug Labs

- 20% are detected when they explode or catch fire
- The “routine” structure or vehicle fire may turn out to NOT be so routine!

*Everything* associated with an  
clandestine drug lab is  
hazardous!

# Hazards

- Chemical
  - Flammables
  - Corrosives
  - Compressed gases
  - Toxins
    - Cyanide
    - Phosgene

# Hazards

- Physical
  - Unstable containers
  - Confined spaces, obstacles
  - Poor or absent ventilation
  - Slippery footing

# Hazards

- Electrical
  - Exposed wiring
  - Reversed switches, rheostats

# Hazards

- Biological
  - Attack dogs (10% of labs)
  - Venomous animals

# Hazards

- Booby traps
  - Grenades on trip wires
  - Fish hooks hung at eye level
  - Punji pits
  - Explosives connected to electrical switches
  - Crossbows and spear guns on trip wires

# Hazards

- Booby traps
  - Contact explosives
  - Acid containers on door jambs
  - Creative carpentry

# Operations

- Unattended lab is most dangerous
  - Some processes take up to 72 hours
  - Operators set up reactions, leave
  - Impossible to determine stage process is in or how to shut it down

# Operations

- Touch nothing!
- Attempt to turn off nothing!
- Get out as quickly as possible!
- Do NOT use your radio until you are out of and well away from lab!

# Operations

- Lab, area containing any personnel or equipment in contact with lab is HAZMAT HOT zone!
- Vehicles that have come in contact with equipment, people that entered lab are part of HOT zone!

# Response should include

- Local law enforcement
- DEA
- EPA
- Fire department first alarm response
- HAZMAT team
- Police EOD unit
- Local health department
- Additional EMS units
- EMS supervisory personnel

# Operations

- Drug lab incidents are multi-agency operations!
- Time to plan for them is BEFORE lab is discovered!

# Operations

- Stable patient:
  - Leave lab
  - Remain in hot zone with patient until HAZMAT team arrives
  - Do NOT return to ambulance if it is outside hot zone
  - Follow HAZMAT team instructions regarding decon

# Operations

- Unstable patient:
  - Advise hospital of situation
  - Request HAZMAT response to hospital to conduct decon there
  - Hospital personnel who contact patient, you, or your equipment will require decon

# Operations

- Evacuate structures on all sides of lab
- If fire or spill is present, evacuate downwind
- If structure is burning, protect exposures; let it burn!
- Consider spread, effects of runoff

# Operations

- Wait on DEA chemist before making decisions to cut off power, gas, or water
- Gas, power, water should be shut off from well outside building
- In some cases chemist may recommend withdrawing, waiting for process to complete

# Operations

- Personnel monitoring
  - EMS should monitor everyone working in the hot zone
  - Everyone leaving the hot zone should be evaluated after decontamination

# Operations

- Danger signs
  - Nausea
  - Vomiting
  - Headache
  - Flushed face
  - Burning of nose, throat, lungs
  - Drowsiness
  - Numbness, tingling of lips
  - Blurred vision

# Operations

- Drug labs are crime scenes
- Protect the evidence!